

# Epitome of Eighteen Histories 11: Varona Episode

T/N: Thanks for the patience, hiatus is officially over. I'm back! (And rusty!)  
Comments are great, also I tried formatting the furigana as superscript instead this time.

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## Epitome of Eighteen Histories 11

### Varona Episode

This is a story of the past and the future.  
A story of twisted time.



Somewhere in Russia.

“Greetings! Is it you, young miss? The Yamato Nadeshiko who wished to hear the tales of my exploits?”

A Russian man with a moustache evoking the image of a bear said this with a big smile upon entering the reception room.

Unable to understand the sudden stream of Russian, the Japanese woman this voice addressed could only wear an expression of confusion at the mention of the Japanese words ‘Yamato Nadeshiko’.

A thin Russian with sharp eyes, who had up till then been sitting across from the woman, excused himself in Japanese, and stood up to berate his moustached colleague.

“I remember quite clearly telling you to stay in the back and not get in the way. Has vodka permeated your brain to the point you can no longer understand simple Russian, Comrade Lingerin?”

“Don’t worry! I understood perfectly, Drakon! I simply elected to ignore it!”

“I see; so it’s not your lingual ability but your ability to comply that has degenerated. You were beyond saving from the moment you used the term ‘Yamato Nadeshiko’ despite claiming to not know a drop of Japanese.”

“Ha! I know ‘AKITA KOMACHI’ and ‘KYOBIJIN’, too!”

(\*Describe beautiful women.)

“Wonderful. Do also remember the words ‘delicacy’ and ‘common sense’ so you may gain the favour of the kind of Japanese people those terms describe. Not to forget the definitions as well, of course.”

As the men who each resembled a bear and a razor blade respectively had this exchange, the Japanese woman seated on the sofa in the drawing room was left watching on lostly.

“Uh, um...”

The woman said in Japanese reflexively, to which the moustached man referred to as Lingerin glared at the one facing off with him—Drakon.

“See, now you’re putting her in a spot because you didn’t introduce me.”

“I imagine she will be even more confused if I were to do so. In the first place, are you aware who this is?”

“Look, she’s a fan of mine who came all the way from Japan to hear stories of my achievements, no?”

At that answer, Drakon, still looking frostily at Lingerin, said in a voice less warm than ice itself:

“This woman is not your fan or anything of the sort, but a freelance journalist who has journeyed a long way from Japan to learn about the history of our organisation and the weapons trade in Russia, Kinomiya Kazane. We accepted the interview since she is a special case, having been introduced by Dennis and Samia. To be frank, your presence alone is lowering the value of our goods, so I would urge you to remove yourself from this room ASAP.”

Despite being so ruthlessly rejected, Lingerin nodded with enthusiasm as he replied, before sitting down on the sofa himself,

“It’s not wrong to say the history of our organisation and the tales of my exploits are one and the same, huh?”

“You are at full liberty if you wish to make clear that your heroic and humiliating moments are sides of the same coin, but I shan’t be translating anything you say, so do proceed, President Lingerin.”

“What a cruel vice president.”

“It is the duty of the right-hand man to compensate for the lackings of the leader. Be it that ninety percent of Comrade Lingerin’s work is a compounded failure, it is my job to respect the remaining ten percent.”

With these cold words, Drakon took a seat beside Lingerin, and began to speak in fluent Japanese to the woman sitting across from them.

“Apologies for the unsightly scene. This is Lingerin Douglanikov, the representative director of our organisation. You may treat him as background noise.”

“R-representative director?!”

The shocked journalist looked towards Lingerin, who was now browsing a sample magazine she had brought in. He said to himself with a contented smile,

“Hoho, I don’t understand since it’s all in Japanese, but this magazine’s full of pictures of things like UFOs and mokèlé-mbèmbé and Slenderman. Perhaps to the Japanese, people in our occupation exist on the same tier as exotic beasts.”

Upon hearing the translation, the journalist hastily attempted to deny his statement, but Lingerin gestured with his hand for her to stop, and continued,

“No, no, I’m not angry, don’t worry. It’s not a bad thing in itself, being placed alongside legendary monsters. I just thought that, instead of the boring history this guy’s telling you, it’ll be more fun to tell you an interesting urban legend more suited to magazines, right? Hey, translate this properly, Drakon. It’s nothing about me, so relax.”

“...”

Without even sighing, Drakon scrutinised Lingerin silently for a few seconds, before translating word-for-word.

The Japanese journalist named Kazane, despite her initial apprehension, became bright-eyed upon hearing this full explanation, and requested, excitedly, to hear more.

From the look on her face, Lingerin sensed that she had agreed to his suggestion, and without waiting for Drakon’s translation, he began to tell the tale.

Of an event so fantastic it might as well be urban legend; revolving around one woman.



The past. Somewhere in Russia.

“Hey. Have you heard of Crow [Varona]?”

“What crow?”

This was the oblivious reply of a man clad in full combat gear—consisting of a

balacava and goggles, as well as camouflage clothing and an assault rifle—standing beside the scar-faced man who first spoke.

The exchange took place within the headquarters of a certain paramilitary group, and there were many other similarly outfitted men stationed both inside and outside the building.

For all it masqueraded as a paramilitary group, however, the organisation was more akin to a tribe of modern bandits who involved themselves in unsavoury crimes behind the government's back.

Although it hardly possessed the power of the Russian mafia, it had less restraint than one would expect, and was recognised in the region as a particularly brutal group.

What escaped the lips of the scar-faced man who headed this organisation was a curious urban legend:

"Word is there's a mad assassin that goes by Varona. Like America's Vito; it's something between a horror story and a myth."

"A myth?"

"It seems the killer's third on the list of Russia's most feared hitmen; melting into the shadows by night, and by day soaring freer than the Western capitalists.

Whoever falls prey is forced to flee without rest night and day, and before they know it, they've become a corpse in the ground, food for the crows."

—A worthless story.

Lizard thought to himself.

"I've heard the rumours of some hitman ranking. But as I recall, it was pointless drivel that claimed the fourth or fifth place was a vampire, am I wrong?"

"...Yeah, you're right, it's nonsense. I suppose I've been feeling watched these past few days. It reminded me of that assassin, that's all."

"Is that why you specially hired an assassin like me to play bodyguard?"

"Yeah. It's not some freak out of rumour or myth but you I have on my side; right here with me, in reality, I have the most reliable hitman I know, the Lizard [Yashcheritsa] himself."

"I've already said I have no fondness for that nickname."

The man said tonelessly. The scarred man shrugged and replied,

"Isn't it alright? It's fitting, with the way you hunt down your prey so calmly with those reptilian eyes. Hey, how can you be so unaffected when you take lives, and

even afterwards? I'd believe if you were really a killing machine in the shape of a human, never mind a lizard."

"...I harbour no hopes for my own future or this organisation. That's all. Some might say it's robotlike, but it's preferable to having a loose cannon who can laugh while killing, yes?"

The man dubbed 'Lizard' had no intention to change the subject, and was, from his perspective, simply stating the unadulterated truth.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you were ranked on an assassin list like that, though."

"Ridiculous. What would a hitman stand to gain from fame?"

"Nothing."

The room that should have been empty save for himself, his employer, and the men working as bodyguards suddenly echoed with a woman's clear voice. And it was from right behind him.

"...!"

As Lizard spun, readying his gun on reflex—

He met the eyes of that same woman at the closest distance imaginable.

"It's simply the self-indulgence of the deranged."

At the same time he realised her words referred to the hitman rankings, he found that his body was bound by a black material.

Too late he registered it was the slender arms of the woman, covered in special black camo; and as though being led in a dance, he was puppeteered in a whirl of force—one which turned him on his heel and **made him pull the rifle's trigger**.

Resounding gunshots.

Muffled screams.

It was to this background music that Lizard saw.

The woman who was creating carnage with his body, joyfully, joyfully, and so very humanly, smiling.

Seconds later.

The only ones left standing in the room were the man and woman who had performed that warped dance.

"How unusual. You're not going to shoot me?"

Lizard took in once again the sight of the woman who said this, the muzzle of his gun pointed to the ground.

She looked to be about 20 years old, with remnants of childishness on her face.

Blonde hair fluttered beautifully around her neck, its hue shining brightly against the black of her camouflage gear.

As he abruptly recalled a species of bird in Russia, with a jet black body and a neck ringed in white, the name came to Lizard easily:

“...Are you Crow [Varona]?”

“If you’ve understood that much, why aren’t you moving?”

“There’s no reason for me to move.”

“Not even when you could avenge your boss right here?”

Crow said wonderingly. Lizard replied, blandly,

“My mission here has already failed. I owe no debt to him which would necessitate that I avenge him, and killing you now will do nothing to salvage my name in this situation. ...In fact I’d ask you the same thing. Is it really fine for you to leave a witness like me still breathing?”

“It’s fine, since you were never a target, Mr. Lizard. Even if you were to testify to the police as a witness, who do you think would believe you?”

“...That you expect me to turn to the cops instead of my comrades—I suppose everyone outside has been wiped out as well?”

“You catch on fast. You’re right; I did it with the silencer-equipped pistol you had in your room.”

In other words, an outsider could only conclude that Lizard had betrayed the organisation and eliminated his boss and colleagues.

Despite being cornered as such, Lizard showed no sign of being bothered by the situation.

“I see. If you hold no malice against me, I have no reason to kill you either.”

“Oh...? I did hear the rumours, but you really are dispassionate. Anyway, I doubt we’ll meet again, but this was fun. Bye now.”

The woman said, turning away. Still expressionless, Lizard spoke.

“What should I do to meet you again?”

The man, who had only just endured the utter ignominy of having his employer killed by his very own gun, found himself saying these words before he knew it. Meanwhile, Varona’s face shifted to an expression of shock more suited to a young girl, for just an instant, before immediately a lascivious smile rose on her face, and she replied, teasingly,

“What would you do if we did meet?”

“No idea. Just thought it would be a waste, if I never got to see you again.”

Lizard answered, as though he himself was clueless why he asked such a question in the first place, and Varona smiled at him, somehow innocently, and said,

“Whether it’s to kill me, or for any other reason... There’s no way you can reach me when you’re still crawling on the ground.”

Then, walking towards the darkness beyond the window frames, she left behind her only her next words:

“Find yourself some wings and fly from that tiny place you’re in.”

“Do that, and if there’s anyone who can catch me... it’ll be you.”



In the future. Lingerin’s office.

“So in the end, whether Lizard spread his wings and became another sort of creature entirely... is left to our imagination. Well, it just goes to show even the craziest conversations between assassins can leak out. It’s up to you to decide just how true the story is, though.”

As Lingerin’s story drew to its close, the journalist enthusiastically showered praise on him in Japanese.

Wary of Lingerin thinking too highly of himself, Drakon chose not to translate her compliments.

Instead, he slowly began to lay into his employer.

“...I didn’t expect I would end up being made to translate my own past disgrace and **a legend of my dead wife**, but a promise is a promise. I shall choose to believe that it was a marginally more meaningful activity than translating your history. But do remember, I will eventually be collecting on this debt, and several times over.”

“Come on, it’s fine since I didn’t say anything about the current young miss Varona, isn’t it? Or would you prefer to show off your daughter yourself?”

“Hilarious. ...Yes, it’s such a great joke that you employed her so as to poach me, and then exaggerated that the image of her lusting for dead flesh was like a crow and deliberately designated her my wife’s old code name. Truly hilarious. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

Lingerin, at the sound of this toneless laugh cold as permafrost and accompanied by no expression whatsoever, escaped the conversation by addressing the journalist.

“Anyway, young miss. Are there any stories like these famous in Japan? It’s not everyday I get to hear the scoop straight from an actual journalist. ...Hurry up, Drakon, translate that.”

“...”

Despite remaining expressionless as ever, Drakon translated every word and conveyed it to the Japanese woman.

In return, she hesitated for a moment, before beginning, slowly,

“That’s right... How does this sound, then. In a district called Ikebukuro in Japan, there’s an urban legend of a Headless Rider... It’s not just a story, there’s an actual figure that drives through the streets getting into dramatic car chases with the cops.”

After Drakon translated this, Lingerin grinned humorously and leant forward.

“Oho, what on earth, that’s exactly my cup of tea!”

“But in real life the Headless Rider is actually a woman, and a very lovely person...”

And so, crossing continents, two urban legends intersected.

Clueless that the heiress to the name ‘Varona’ and the legend in flesh that was the Headless Rider had already crossed paths, the woman continued to speak, passionately, of the legend.

As though boasting of her own family.

Or perhaps she was also longing for the city of Ikebukuro she spoke of in her tale, from which she had been separated for but a few days.

Here, in a faraway land, yet under the same sky.

Speaking brightly, brightly—

**\*\*\*\*EPISODE END\*\*\*\***

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